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# Assessment of Errors Made by Iraqi EFL University Students in Using Complex Prepositions

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# 1 Introduction

Complex prepositions are common in English sentences. They are the prepositions that are made up of a group of two or more words. They have several functions depending on the context in which they occur. Also, there is no logical reason why one complex preposition is right in a certain context, whereas another is wrong.

The proper use of complex prepositions is one of the serious problems encountered by Iraqi EFL university students. To use complex prepositions correctly is difficult because most of them have several functions. Different prepositions have similar uses. So it is normal to commit mistakes.

This study aims at:

1. Identifying and analyzing the errors which Iraqi EFL university students are liable to make in using complex prepositions.
2. Rationalizing the possible reasons for such errors.

In view of the preceding aims, it is hypothesized that:

1) Most Iraqi EFL university students encounter difficulties in producing complex prepositions.
2) Most of them do not discern the position of complex prepositions.
3) Most of them do not know how to recognize the meaning of such prepositions.
4) Most of them generally flunk to acquire the proper use of complex prepositions.

The procedures followed in this study can be summed up as follows:

1- Presenting an account of complex prepositions depending on what has been written on this sort of preposition.

2- Carrying out a test and applying it to a number of students at fourth year so as to find out the difficulties they face in these prepositions.
3- Analyzing the results of the test, on the bases of which conclusions are presented.

This study is limited to one hundred and fourteen Iraqi EFL university students at their fourth year at the Department of English, College of Education, University of Babylon in the academic year 2008-2009. They have studied this topic in the second year of their study.

## 2 Complex Prepositions

Complex prepositions are the prepositions that consist of more than one word, especially when a noun or a noun phrase is both followed and preceded by single prepositions as in "***on account of***" (Crystal, 2003: 460).

The boundary between simple and complex prepositions is not entirely clear. Depending on orthography, separation is the easiest way to discriminate between them, but there are some anomalies such as writing '***into***' as one word and '***out of***' as two words. This emphasizes the idea of arbitrariness of the distinction between one and more than one word. The best way to discriminate between simple and complex prepositions is that a simple preposition is still identical in form to its correspondence adverb, whereas a complex preposition forfeits its final element when transferred to the function of adverb (***apart from*** → ***apart***), (Quirk et al. 1985: 301-2).

Interestingly, some complex prepositions can be transferred to other parts of speech when dropping their final prepositions (e.g. ***instead***, ***out*** [adverb]; ***because***, ***except***, ***in case*** [conjunction]; ***in front***, ***on top*** [adverbials]) (Chalker, 1989:216).

Another distinction it is important to draw is that between the terms: 'complex preposition' and 'prepositional phrase'. The former means the preposition that consists of more than one word and which behaves just like a single preposition. The latter consists of the preposition + the prepositional complement, usually a noun phrase (e.g. ***in the garden***) (ibid.: 214).

Stageberg (1981: 169) states that prepositions are "words like ***of***, ***in*** and ***to*** which are usually followed by a noun, noun phrase, personal pronoun, or noun-substitute called the object of the preposition. The unit of preposition-plus-object of preposition is called a prepositional phrase."

1- George came ***with*** Ann.

2- Janet jumped ***on*** the fence.

Grammarians classify English prepositions into different ways. Palmer and Blandford (1976: 289) subsume prepositions under simple prepositions which consist of single words (e.g. ***across***, ***before***, ***from***) or group prepositions which consist of more than one word (e.g. ***according to***, ***out of***, ***because of***). A number of two and three word phrases (e.g. ***in spite of, according to, apart from***) behave like simple prepositions. (Roberts, 1956: 89) mentions that we spell these prepositions as separate words, but we use them as units, and it is simpler to consider them as single prepositions. Quirk et al. (1985:144-5) mention that most of these are subsumed under the following categories:

a) Adverb or preposition + preposition: ***along with***, ***as for***, ***away from***, ***out of***, ***up to***.
b) Verb / adjective / conjunction / + preposition: ***owing to***, ***due t***o, ***because of***.
c) Prep + noun + prep: ***by means of***, ***in comparison with***, ***in front of***.

In [c], which is by far the most numerous category, the noun in some complex prepositions is preceded by a definite or an indefinite article: ***in <u>the</u> light of***, ***as <u>a</u> result of***. In addition to complex prepositions, simple prepositions are composed of one word (ibid.).

Complex prepositions can be classified into two-word sequences and three-word ones. **A** and **b** categories can be classified under two-words sequences, whereas **c** can be classified as three-words sequences (ibid.: 669).

There are some cases of lexicalization which have been accompanied historically by some syntactic restructuring. For instance, '***because of***' comes from '***by cause of***' and '***inside***' derives from '***in +side+of***', (Huddleston, 1985: 342-44).

Here is a list of some two-word prepositions followed by another list of three-word sequences preposition. Then, prepositions are all mentioned by Quirk et al. (1985: 669-71).To clarify them better, the researchers consult Hornby (2006) for their meanings and add them in front of each complex preposition.

Table (1)

Two-Word Prepositions

| | |
|---|---|
| **Up against**: facing problems or opposition or in a difficult situation. | **As per:** in accordance with or as usual. |
| **As for**: (i) used to start talking about somebody or something, and (ii) regarding.<br>**Except for**: apart from or not including. | **But for**: if it were not for. |
| **Apart from**: (i) except for, (ii) in addition to, and (iii) as well as. | **Aside from**: except for or apart from.<br>**As from**: used to show the time or date from |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Away from**: (i) distant from somebody or something in space and time, and (ii) absent. | which something starts. |
| **Ahead of**: (i) further forward in space and time than somebody or something, (ii) in front of somebody or something, and (iii) earlier than somebody or something.<br>**Back of**: behind something (us).<br>**Exclusive of**: not including somebody or something.<br>**Instead of:** in place of somebody or something.<br>**Off of**: (i) off and (ii) from.<br>**Outside of**: (i) apart from, (ii) not in a particular place (iii)away from, (iv) not part of something, and (v) on or to a place on the outside of something.<br>**Upwards of**: more than the amount or number mentioned. | **As of**: (i) as from and (ii) as at a specified time.<br>**Because of**: for the reason that.<br>**Devoid of**: completely lacking something.<br>**Inside of**: (i) on or to the inner part of somebody or something, (ii) within somebody or something, and (iii) in less than the amount of time mentioned.<br>**Irrespective of**: (i) without considering something or being influenced by it and (ii) regardless of.<br>**Out of**: away from.<br>**Regardless of**: (i) paying no attention to somebody or something, and (ii) treating somebody or something as not being important.<br>**Void of**: devoid or completely lacking something. |
| **According to**: (i) as stated or reported by somebody or something, (ii) following, (iii) agreeing with, and (iv) depending on something.<br>**Close to**: in a position very near to something.<br>**Due to**: (i) caused by somebody or something and (ii) because of.<br>**Next to**: (i) Close to, (ii) in or into a position right beside somebody or something, (iii) | **As to**: used when you are referring to something.<br>**Contrary to**: (i) different from something, and (ii) against something.<br>**Near(er) to**: (i) at a short distance, (ii) away from somebody or something, (iii) a short period of time from something used before a number to mean approximately, (iv) similar to somebody or something in quality and size, and (v) close to a |

| | |
|---|---|
| following in order or importance after somebody or something, (iv) almost, and (v) in comparison with somebody or something.<br>**Owing to**: because of<br>**Preparatory to**: to prepare for.<br>**Prior to**: before something.<br>**Subsequent to**: after or following.<br>**Up to**: (i) until (ii) not more than (iii) less than or equal to (iv) incumbent on (v) capable of or fit for, and (vi) occupied or busy with. | particular state.<br>**On to**: (i) get in touch with, and (ii) realize the significance or intention of.<br>**Preliminary to**: it is an action or event that is done in preparation for something or happening before a more important action or event.<br>**Previous to**: (i) happening or existing before the event or object that somebody is talking about, and (ii) immediately before the time somebody is talking about.<br>**Pursuant to**: (i) according to, (ii) following a rule or law, and (iii) in accordance with.<br>**Thanks to**: something has happened because of somebody or something. |
| **Along with**: (i) in addition to somebody or something, and (ii) in the same way as somebody or something. | **Together with**: (i) including, (ii) in addition to, and (iii) as well as. |

Table (2)
Three-Word Sequences Prepositions

| In + noun + of: | |
|---|---|
| **In aid of**: in order to help somebody or something = (in support of).<br>**In behalf of**: in order to help somebody.<br>**In charge of**: having command.<br>**In (the) face of**: (i) as a result, and (ii) in spite | **In back of**: (i) on the back of, and (ii) **as** a result of an action or a success.<br>**In case of**: (i) if something happens, and (ii) in the event of.<br>**In consequence of**: as a result of something. |

| | |
|---|---|
| of problems and difficulties= (despite).<br>**In front of**: (i) ahead of, (ii) **in** the presence of, and (iii) confronting.<br>**In lieu of**: instead of.<br>**In place of**: instead of.<br>**In quest of**: seeking.<br>**In search of**: looking for somebody or something.<br>**In view of**: considering something = (having regard to) | **In favour of**: (i) in support of, and (ii) in advantage of.<br>**In (the) light of**: after considering something.<br>**In need of**: requiring.<br>**In (the) process of**: (i) a series of things that are done in order to achieve a particular result (ii) with the time goes on.<br>**In respect of**: (i) concerning, (ii) in payment for something, (iii) as concerns, and (iv) with reference to.<br>**In spite of**: despite |
| In + noun + with: | |
| **In accordance with**: according to.<br>**In comparison with**: compared to.<br>**In conformity with**: (i) following the rules of something, and (ii) confirming.<br>**In line with**: in (or not in) accordance with. | **In common with**: in the same way as somebody or something.<br>**In compliance with**: according to (a wish, command, etc.)<br>**In contact with**: the act of communicating with somebody regularly. |
| By + noun + of: | |
| **By dint of**: by means of.<br>**By virtue of**: (i) by means of, and (ii) because of. | **By means of**: by the agency or instrumentality of a thing or action.<br>**By way of**: (i) via, (ii) through, (iii) by means of, (iv) as a substitute for, and (v) as a form of |
| On + noun + of: | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **On account of**: because of somebody or something.<br>**On (the) ground(s) of**: a good or true reason for doing or saying something.<br>**On pain of**: with the threat of having something done to you as a punishment if you do not obey.<br>**On the strength of**: because somebody has been influenced or persuaded by something= (relying on) or (on the basis of). | **On behalf of**: (i) instead of them, (ii) in order to help somebody, (iii) as representative of somebody or something (iv) because of somebody, and (v) for somebody.<br>**On the matter of**: (i) concerning and (ii) as regard to.<br>**On the part of**: made or done by somebody.<br>**On top of**: (i) on; over or covering something or somebody, (ii) in addition to something, (iii) very close to something or somebody, and (iv) in control of a situation. |
| Other types: | |
| **As far as**: (i) to the distance of (a place), and (ii) to the extent that.<br>**At the expense of**: with loss or damage to somebody or something.<br>**For (the) sake of**: (i) out of consideration for, (ii) in the interest of, (iii) because of or owing to, and (iv) in order to please, honour get or keep.<br>**In exchange for**: an act of giving something to somebody and receiving something in return.<br>**In addition to**: as something added.<br>**With / in regard to**: concerning something.<br>**With / in respect to**: concerning somebody or something. | **At variance with**: disagreeing with or opposing somebody or something.<br>**At the hands of**: because of somebody or something.<br>**For / from want of**: because of a lack of something or because something is not available.<br>**In return for**: (i) as a way of thanking somebody, (ii) paying them for something they have done, and (iii) as response or a reaction to something.<br>**In relation to**: (concerning or compared with)<br>**With / in reference to**: used to say what you're talking or writing about.<br>**With the exception of**: except. |

## 2.1 Prepositional Meanings

A preposition is used to express a relation between two entities, one is represented by the prepositional complement and the other is represented by another part of the sentence. Relational meaning of space and time can be described systematically. Other relationships such as instrument cause and concession may also be recognized, although it is difficult to describe prepositional meanings systematically in terms of such labels (Quirk et al. 1985: 673).

### 2.1.1 Prepositions Denoting Spatial Relation

Prepositions that denote spatial relation can be classified into the following:

#### 2.1.1.1 Dimension

Here, the choice of the preposition depends on the dimension of the object. For instance, a floor is a flat surface and may be considered as two-dimensional. On the other hand, a room may be considered as three-dimensional. However, it is not the real dimensions of the object, but how the speaker sees or envisages it at the time of speaking, not on how the object can be measured mathematically according to the three dimension types. For example, a wall may be seen as a surface (Leech and Svartvik, 1975: 82) (Shepherd et al. 1991: 272).

3- Go ***out of*** the office. (Close, 1975:167)

4- She jumped ***on to*** the horse. (Quirk et al. 1985: 675)

5- Tom is running ***away from*** the hill. (Shepherd et al. 1991:269)

The complex preposition ***as far as*** is used to stress the length of the journey. It refers only to space, but it does not refer to time (Quirk et al. 1985: 677).

6- They drove ***as far as*** Edinburgh. (ibid.)

7- Go ***as far as*** x. (Close, 1975: 167)

### 2.1.1.2 Negative Position

The negative prepositions **away from** and **out of** may be defined simply by adding the word ***not*** to their corresponding positive preposition: ***away from*** [‘not at’] ***out of*** [‘not in’].

8- Ann is ***away from*** home. (Ann is not at home)

9- Tom is ***out of*** the water. (Tom is not in the water) (Quirk et al. 1985:678)

### 2.1.1.3 Relative Position

Apart from simple preposition, prepositions may express relative position between two or more objects. ***On top of*** represents relative position vertically (i.e. it denotes that something is above the higher surface of an object), whereas ***in front of*** expresses it horizontally (Shepherd et al. 1991: 273).

10- We placed the skis ***on top of*** the car. (Quirk et al. 1985:678)

11- There’s a bus stop ***in front of*** the house. (Hornby, 2006: 625)

### 2.1.1.4 Space

The complex prepositions ***close to***, ***near(er) to***, ***next to*** are locative prepositions. The simple preposition ***near*** which means ***close to*** can be represented by the complex preposition ***near to***.

12- She was sitting { ***near (to)*** / ***close (to)*** } me. (Quirk et al. 1985: 680)

***Near (to)*** and ***close to*** are the only prepositions which can be inflected for comparison unlike absolute form. So we can say ***nearer to***, ***nearest to***, ***closer to***, and ***closest to*** (ibid.).

13- She was sitting { ***nearer (to)*** / ***nearest (to)*** / ***next to*** me.
{ ***closer to*** / ***closest to*** me. (Ibid.)

14- Go and sit ***nearer to*** the fire. (Hornby, 2006: 1017)

### 2.1.1.5 Resultative Meaning

Resultative meaning is not always distinguished from other static meaning. However, its presence is often characterized by certain adverbs (***already***, ***just***, ***at last***, (***not***) ***yet***, etc.) (Quirk et al. 1985: 684).

15- At last we are ***out of*** the forest. (ibid.)

16- At last Mr Green is ***out of*** town this week. (Hornby, 2006: 1074)

### 2.1.1.6 Metaphorical or Abstract Use

Many prepositions of place have abstract meanings which are clearly related to their locative uses through metaphorical connection. Such prepositions are used to keep the grouping in terms of similarity or contrast of meaning that they have when used in a literal reference to place (Quirk et al. 1985: 685).

Examples in relation to the literal meanings are the following:

Position → state, condition:

17- To be ***out of*** danger, to be ***out of*** office, to keep ***out of*** trouble, to be ***out of*** a job. (ibid.: 686)

Enclosure → abstract inclusion:

18- ***Out of*** the race. (ibid.)

Destination → abstract condition or circumstances:

19- Can you get me ***out of*** this mess? (ibid.)

### 2.1.2 Prepositions Denoting Time

The complex preposition ***up to*** is used to denote the starting and the ending of a point in a period. ***Up to*** specifies that the longer period does not include the period named in the prepositional complement (Leech and Svartvik, 1975: 79-80).

20- "We camped there ***up to*** September." (Quirk et al. 1985: 690)

21- "We worked ***up to*** Christmas (but not over Christmas)." (ibid.)

Informally ***till*** can be used with ***up*** instead of ***until*** (Hewings: 2005: 180).

22- I've just bought a computer. I've always used a typewriter ***up*** {***to*** / ***till***} now. (ibid.)

23- The roadworks are likely to go on ***up*** {***to*** / ***till***} the end of May. (ibid.)

### 2.1.3 Cause, Reason, Motive

Such prepositions may express the material cause or the psychological cause (motive) for a happen. Phrases of cause, reason and motive answer the question Why…?

24- We had to drive slowly ***because of*** the heavy rain.

25- ***On account of*** his wide experience, he was made chairman.

26- Some support charities ***out of*** duty, some ***out of*** a sense of guilt. (Quirk et al. 1985: 695-6)

The complex preposition ***on account of*** is the formal alternative to ***because of*** and it is restricted to the expression of cause or reason, whereas

***out of*** is mainly restricted to the expression of motive, i.e. psychological cause: ***out of*** gratitude / kindness / etc. (ibid.)

The complex prepositions ***due to*** and ***owing to*** are used to show a reason for something (Hewings, 2005: 160).

27- She was unable to run ***owing to*** / ***due to*** a leg injury. (=because of a leg.)

28- We have less money to spend ***owing to*** / ***due to*** budget cuts. (=because of budget cuts.)

"In current English we usually avoid ***owing to*** directly after a form of be" (ibid.).

29- The company's success is ***due to*** the new director. (not… is owing to…)

However, ***owing to*** is preceded by the verb be + an adverb such as ***entirely***, ***largely***, ***mainly***, ***partly*** (ibid.).

30- The low election turnout was partly ***due to*** / ***owing to*** the bad weather.

We can often say either ***it was due to … that*** or ***it was owing … that***.

31- It was ***owing to*** his encouragement ***that*** she applied for the job (or it was ***due to***… ***that***) (ibid.).

### 2.1.4 Concession

The complex preposition ***in spite of*** is a general-purpose preposition of concession.

32- I admire him, ***in spite of*** his faults. (Quirk et al. 1985: 705)

33- ***In spite of*** his age, he still leads an active life. (Hornby, 2006 :1476)

### 2.1.5 Respect

Some complex prepositions that refer to respect are used in the context of business letters.

34- ***With reference to*** [less usual: ***In reference to***] your letter / request /enquiring of April 29th, I confirm my Directors' agreement to advance a further sum of ₤ 2000. <formal>

35- ***With regard to*** the date of delivery … [less usual ***In regard to***; typically introducing a secondary or tertiary topic in such a letter] (Quirk et al. 1985: 705).

The prepositions have the same area of meaning: ***with respect to***, ***in respect of***, ***on the matter of***, and ***as to*** (ibid.).

The complex preposition ***as to*** means on the subject of (Close, 1975: 177). It functions like ***with regard to***, ***as regards***, etc (Quirk et al. 1985: 706).

36- ***As to*** the question you raise in your last letter, I think that … (ibid.)

37- No agreement was reached { ***as to*** / =concerning } { rent / how much we should pay. } (Close, 1975: 177)

***"As to*** is also used in the sense of according to, e.g.: correct ***as to*** size and colour" (Quirk et al. 1987: 706).

On the other hand, ***as for*** means speaking of or ***with reference to*** (Close, 1975: 177). This preposition introduces a topic transition, so it cannot be used at the beginning of a discourse. It has the meaning of 'returning to the question of', and is less formal than the other complex prepositions denoting respect (Quirk et al. 1985: 706-7).

38- I don't blame George. ***As for*** John, he has behaved so badly. (Close, 1975: 177)

39- We had a delightful weekend in the country. ***As for*** the traffic, we had no difficulty. (Quirk et al. 1985: 707)

Sometimes, the preposition ***as for*** occurs initially to indicate a contemptuous attitude.

40- ***As for*** his book, I supposed you've read the reviews! (ibid.)

41- ***As for*** Jo, she's doing fine. (Hornby, 2006: 74)

### 2.1.6 Exception

The complex prepositions that indicate exception are: ***except for***, ***with the exception of***, ***apart from***, ***aside from*** <esp AmE>. When used in adverbials, prepositions denoting exception function primarily as disjuncts.

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42- ***With the exception of*** James, none of us had any money.

43- The worst period of my life, { ***apart from*** the war / ***aside from*** the war <esp AmE> } was when I was out of work. (Quirk et al. 1985: 707)

44- ***Except for*** George, you can all go. (Close, 1975: 178)

### 2.1.7 Addition

Addition can be expressed by the following complex prepositions: ***in addition to*** and ***as well as***.

45- There were three people present ***in addition to*** the committee. (Quirk et al. 1985: 708)

46- You can go ***as well as*** George. (Close, 1975: 177)

### 2.1.8 Negative Condition

The preposition ***but for*** is not used for the purpose of exception but it is rather used for the purpose of negative condition.

47- ***But for*** Gordon, we would have lost the match. ['If it hadn't been for Gordon…', 'If Gordon hadn't played as he did…,' etc] (Quirk et al. 1985: 709)

It is thought that ***except for*** works like ***but for*** to denote a negative condition. However, ***except for*** normally denotes exception. The following two sentences are different in their meanings:

48- ***Except for*** John they { would all have died. ['If it hadn't been for John...']
{ all died. ['With the exception of John…'] (ibid.)

49- He would have played ***but for*** a knee injury. (Hornby, 2006: 204)

### 2.1.9 Material, Ingredient

The complex preposition ***out of*** signifies the material or constituency of the whole thing.

50- "He made the frame ***out of*** wood. ['Wood was the only material.']" (Quirk et al. 1985: 710-1)

## 2.2 Modification of Prepositional Phrase

Prepositional meanings (especially of time and place) are subject to modification as regards degree and measure. A preposition may be preceded by an intensifier like many adjectives and adverbs.

51- This cake mix comes ***straight*** <***out of***> the packet.

52- The dog was lying ***right*** <***in the middle of***> the floor. (Quirk et al. 1985: 713)

There is a doubt in such cases whether the intensifier is related to the whole prepositional phrase or to the preposition alone. In the example above,

the intensifier can modify the prepositional adverb: ***right in the middle***(ibid.).

## 2.3 Preposition and Prepositional Adverbs

A prepositional adverb is a particle which is formally related to a preposition, and which often behaves like a preposition with ellipted complement:

53- A car drove { ***past*** the door. [***Past*** is a preposition]
{ ***past***. [***Past*** is a prepositional adverb] (Quirk et al. 1985: 713)

Thus, a prepositional adverb shares the form of a preposition, but it is syntactically different. The prepositional adverb can stand alone as an adjunct, conjunct, postmodifier, without the addition of a prepositional complement:

54- Despite the fine weather, we stayed ***in*** all day. (ibid.)

Prepositions and adverbs combine with a preceding verb e.g.: ***make up for*** (ibid.: 714).

The following list includes some prepositional adverbs related to complex (three-word) prepositions.

55- Why don't you put the trunk { ***on top of*** the car?
{ ***on top***? (ibid.: 715)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| at variance | in addition | in aid |
| in case | in charge | in common |
| in comparson | in context | in charge |
| in favour | in front | in lieu |

in line in need in relation

in return on top

“Prepositional phrases and prepositional adverbs can be seen as the extremes on a scale with a stepwise reduction in explicitness as we proceed from [56] to [60]. In the sentence pattern ‘They are all…’ we can have:”(ibid.)

56- ***in*** (great) ***favour of*** the proposal

57- (greatly) ***in favour of*** the proposal

58- (greatly) ***in favour of*** it

59- (greatly) ***in*** its ***favour***

60- (greatly) ***in favour***

We have in [56] a free syntactic noun phrase with ***favour*** as head which admits adjectival premodification; in [57] a complex preposition ***in favour of*** with ***the proposal*** as complement; in [58] the pronominal substitute for the nominal complement in [57]; in [59] a possessive determiner ***its***; and in [60] the prepositional adverb ***in favour***, which relies for its interpretation on previous mention in the linguistic or situational context. The reduction in [59] (premodification) as compared with [57] and [58] (postmodification) is dealt with in connection with the noun phrase. The step from [59] to [60] is one step beyond premodification structure.

## 3 Data Collection

A diagnostic test is designed to discover the difficulties Iraqi EFL university students, represented here by fourth year students, Department of English, College of Education, University of Babylon 2008-2009, have encountered in using this sort of preposition.

The test consists of four questions (see Appendix I). The first question (henceforth Q.I) asks the subjects to give examples about a restricted group

of complex prepositions. In the second question (Q.II), these learners are asked to underline complex prepositions. The third question (Q.III) asks the subjects to fill in the blanks with the most appropriate complex prepositions. The fourth question (Q.IV) is constructed of ten items in which these learners are required to give the meaning of such prepositions.

Most the items of the test are selected from **Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary** by A S Hornby (2005), **A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language** by Randolph Quirk; Sidney Greenbaum; Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik (1985) and **An Introductory English Grammar** by Norman C. Stageberg (1981). The subjects have studied this topic in their second year of the study.

## 4 Data Analysis

This section deals with the analysis of the outcomes of the test. It elucidates the errors committed by Iraqi EFL university students and the reasons behind these errors. Furthermore, it presents the students' performance at each question in the test in particular and at the entire test in general.

The following table shows the subjects' performance in Q.I.

Table (3)

**Subjects' Achievement of the First Question**

| No. of Item | No. of Correct Responses | % | No. of Incorrect Responses | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 78 | 68.42 | 36 | 31.58 |
| 2 | 59 | 51.75 | 55 | 48.25 |
| 3 | 46 | 40.35 | 68 | 59.65 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | 2 | 1.75 | 112 | 98.25 |
| 5 | 6 | 5.26 | 108 | 94.74 |
| 6 | 4 | 3.51 | 110 | 96.49 |
| 7 | 53 | 46.49 | 61 | 53.51 |
| 8 | 14 | 12.28 | 100 | 87.72 |
| 9 | zero | zero | 114 | 100 |
| 10 | 43 | 37.72 | 71 | 62.28 |
| Total | 305 | 26.75 | 835 | 73.25 |

These results denote that the total number of their correct responses (305, 26.75%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (835, 73.25%). Consequently, Iraqi EFL learners face real difficulties in producing this sort of prepositions. This validates the first hypothesis which states: **Most Iraqi EFL university students encounter difficulties in producing complex prepositions.**

Table (4)

**Subjects' Achievement of the Second Question**

| No. of Item | No. of Correct Responses | % | No. of Incorrect Responses | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 54 | 47.37 | 60 | 52.63 |
| 2 | 52 | 45.61 | 62 | 54.39 |
| 3 | 27 | 23.68 | 87 | 76.32 |
| 4 | 68 | 59.65 | 46 | 40.35 |
| 5 | 57 | 50 | 57 | 50 |
| 6 | 66 | 57.89 | 48 | 42.11 |
| 7 | 56 | 49.12 | 58 | 50.88 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | 50 | 43.86 | 64 | 56.14 |
| 9 | 46 | 40.35 | 68 | 59.65 |
| 10 | 46 | 40.35 | 68 | 59.65 |
| Total | 522 | 45.79 | 618 | 54.21 |

From the table above, it can be figured out that the total number of their incorrect responses (618, 54.21%) is higher than that of the correct ones (522, 45.79%). This verifies the second hypothesis which reads: **Most of them do not discern the position of complex prepositions**.

Table (5)

**Subjects' Achievement of the Third Question**

| No. of Item | No. of Correct Reponses | % | No. of Incorrect Responses | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 3 | 2.63 | 111 | 97.37 |
| 2 | 17 | 14.91 | 97 | 85.09 |
| 3 | 41 | 35.96 | 73 | 64.04 |
| 4 | 15 | 13.16 | 99 | 86.84 |
| 5 | 26 | 22.81 | 88 | 77.19 |
| 6 | 45 | 39.47 | 69 | 60.53 |
| 7 | 18 | 15.79 | 96 | 84.21 |
| 8 | 16 | 14.04 | 98 | 85.96 |
| 9 | 36 | 31.58 | 78 | 68.42 |
| 10 | 9 | 7.89 | 105 | 92.11 |
| Total | 226 | 19.82 | 914 | 80.18 |

It is clear, from the results above, that the total number of the correct responses (226, 19.82%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (914,

80.18%). Most of the subjects do not make out the meaning of complex prepositions.

Table (6)

**Subjects' Achievement of the Fourth Question**

| No. of Item | No. of Correct Reponses | % | No. of Incorrect Responses | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 94 | 82.46 | 20 | 17.54 |
| 2 | 21 | 18.42 | 93 | 81.58 |
| 3 | 100 | 87.72 | 14 | 12.28 |
| 4 | 69 | 60.53 | 45 | 39.47 |
| 5 | 100 | 87.72 | 14 | 12.28 |
| 6 | Zero | Zero | 114 | 100 |
| 7 | 10 | 8.77 | 104 | 91.23 |
| 8 | 36 | 31.58 | 78 | 68.42 |
| 9 | 3 | 2.63 | 111 | 97.37 |
| 10 | 74 | 64.91 | 40 | 35.09 |
| Total | 507 | 44.47 | 633 | 55.53 |

It is intelligible, from these outcomes, that the total number of the correct responses (507, 44.47%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (633, 55.53%). This assures the third hypothesis which reads: **Most of them do not know how to recognize the meaning of such prepositions**. In a word, they do not discern the function of complex prepositions (i.e. place, time, cause, reason, concession, respect, exception, and addition).

The following table shows subjects' achievement of the whole test.

Table (7)

**Subjects' Achievement of the Entire Test**

| No. of Question | No. of Correct Responses | % | No. of Incorrect Responses | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 305 | 26.75 | 835 | 73.25 |
| 2 | 522 | 45.79 | 618 | 54.21 |
| 3 | 226 | 19.82 | 914 | 80.18 |
| 4 | 507 | 44.47 | 633 | 55.53 |
| Total | 1560 | 34.21 | 3000 | 65.79 |

The results denote that the total number of the correct responses (1560, 34.21%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (3000, 65.79%). This indicates that Iraqi EFL university students face real difficulties in recognizing and producing complex prepositions. This proves the fourth hypothesis which states: **Most of them generally flunk to acquire the proper use of complex prepositions.**

## 5 Sources of Errors

Errors seem as inevitable part of language learning (Thornbury, 2000: 113). Traditionally, errors were deemed as the negative part of language learning and they had to be shunned or eradicated. Recently, errors are regarded as natural processes of language learning, (Yule, 2006:166).

In this study, the errors are attributed to interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, context of learning, and communication strategies.

**5.1 Interlingual Transfer**: This sort of error happens owing to the effect of Iraqi EFL university students' first language on the foreign.

Some of the errors in items (5) and (9) of Q.I can reflect the influence of the mother tongue.

Item (5): I speak ***with respect to*** my teacher.

Item (9): this is not for reading ***but for*** writing.

Apparently, some subjects have used Arabic literal translation separately for each word in the complex prepositions rather than giving the meaning for them as a unit (i.e. they have translated these complex prepositions from English into Arabic) because they do not know the meaning of such prepositions as a unit. Some subjects have translated ***with respect to*** as a feeling of admiration for somebody or something (أتكلم ***باحترام*** **مع** أستاذي) in lieu of concerning somebody or something. On the other hand, some subjects think that ***but for*** is used here for exception (هذا ليس للقراءة **ولكن** للكتابة), whereas it means if it were not for (لولا).

The total number of errors that are possibly due to the interlingual transfer is (315, 10.5 %).

5.2 Intralingual Transfer: This sort of errors occurs owing to faulty or partial learning of the target language. Such errors may be the result of the effect of one language item upon another (Penny, 2001: 8-9).

Intralingual errors encompass the following:

**Overgeneralization error**: It involves the incorrect application of the previously learned second language material to a present second language context (Brown, 1987: 87).

**Ignorance of rule restriction**: it means "applying rules to contexts to which they do not apply" (Richards and Sampson, 1974: 70).

**Incomplete application of the rules**: These result from "failure to use certain target language structures because they are thought to be too difficult" (Richards and Schmidt, 2002:185)

**false concepts hypothesized**: these may derive from wrong comprehension of a distinction in the target language (Brown, 1987: 81-3 and Chanier et al. 1992: 134).

Overgeneralization errors emerge in items (2), (3), and (5) of Q.II.

Item (2): The game was called off ***on account of*** rain.

Item (3): I had nothing on ***except for*** my socks.

Item (5): ***As for*** food for the party, that's all being taken care of.

The items above elucidate that Iraqi EFL university students overgeneralize the rule because they envisage that each preposition directly following or preceding the complex preposition is part of it. Most of them do not discern that complex prepositions can be divided into two or three-word sequences prepositions.

Ignorance of rule restrictions is another reason behind subjects' errors in items (2) and (10) of Q.I.

Item (2): Keep your books ***away from*** the fire.

Item (2): He goes ***away from*** her.

Item (2): The son ran ***away from*** his father.

Item (10): I asked him to get ***out of*** the room.

Item (10): His manner was ***out of*** control.

Item (10): The boy is going ***out of*** the house.

In the answers above, the students have use idioms and phrasal verbs in place of complex prepositions.

Similarly in Q.II, some of the errors may be also ascribed to ignorance of rule restrictions.

Item (6): Teachers are ***up against*** some major problems.

Item (7): He built up the business ***at the expense of*** his health.

Item (10): The organization put me ***in contact with*** other people in a similar position.

Here, the students have underlined one preposition assuming it to be the complex preposition.

As for incomplete application of rules, some of the errors in item (9) of Q.IV and item (6) of Q.I may be attributed to.

Item (9): You can go ***as well as*** George. (*similarity or comparison)

Item (6): They ran quickly ***as to*** reach the office early. (*as to means 'in order to')

False concept hypothesized may be also the reason behind some of the subjects' incorrect responses to certain items in Q.IV as in the following examples:

Item (6): The company's position ***with regard to*** overtime is made clear in their contracts. (*time)

Item (3): I've always used the net ***up till*** now. (*manner)

Here, the subjects have concluded the meaning of complex prepositions from the meaning of the sentences.

The total number of errors that are possibly due to the intralingual transfer is (1334, 44.47 %).

**5.3 Context of Learning:** This sort of errors comes from faulty methods of teaching or textbook writers who focus on some aspects of the language and neglect others according to their belief or experiences (Brown, 1987: 179).

It is worth mentioning that complex prepositions have received little attention in grammar textbooks and other books of grammar. Even the writers of these books did not devote enough exercises or examples about such prepositions. As such, the teachers do not focus on these prepositions and do not use them extensively.

The errors in item (4) of Q.I, item (1) of Q.II, item (1) of Q.III, and item (2) of Q.IV may be attributed to the context of learning.

Item (4): She is <u>***owing to***</u> play football.

Item (1): I got the job <u>***on the strength***</u> ***of*** your recommendation.

Item (1): There was nothing they could do, <u>***in place of***</u> hoping things would get better.

Item (2): ***In spite of*** her protestation, Harriet was persuaded to join the guild. (*time)

The total number of errors that are possibly due to the context of learning is (735, 24.5 %).

**5.4 Communication Strategies**: In this section, some of the communication strategies which the learners have been observed to use are outlined:

**Avoidance:** Learners sometimes eschew the items which they perceive to be difficult for them (Lightbown and Spada, 2003: 75).

In item (7) of Q.IV, some students have avoided this item.

Item (7): We had no trouble on the journey ***apart from*** a flat tyre.

**Creating New Words** or **Coinage**: The learner may construct or invent new words or phrases so as to express the desired idea (Faucette, 2001: 15).

Some of the errors in item (4) and (10) of Q.IV may be attributed to coinage.

Item (4): He was unable to walk ***due to*** a leg injury. (*purpose or *manner)

Item (10): Our fax number is changing ***as from*** May 12. (*contrast)

**Guessing:** When the learners are in doubt about the correct answer, they begin to guess (Brown, 2001: 309). Most of the incorrect response of Q.III might be ascribed to guessing.

The total number of errors that may be related to using such strategies is (616, 20.53 %).

## 6 Conclusions

In the light of the students' responses, it can be concluded that:

1. The majority of Iraqi EFL university students face more difficulty in producing complex prepositions as the total number of their correct responses (305, 26.75%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (835, 73.25%). This verifies the first hypothesis.
2. Most of them do not recognize the position of complex prepositions because they envisage that each preposition directly following or preceding the complex preposition is related to it. Consequently, the total number of their incorrect responses (618, 54.21%) is higher than that of the correct ones (522, 45.79%). This validates the second hypothesis.
3. Most of them encounter difficulties in recognizing the meaning of complex prepositions as the total number of the correct responses (507, 44.47%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (633, 55.53%). This assures the third hypothesis.

4. Most of them fail to acquire complex prepositions correctly. For this reason, the total number of the correct responses (1560, 34.21%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (3000, 65.79%). This indicates that Iraqi EFL university students face real difficulties in recognizing and producing complex prepositions. This proves the fourth hypothesis.
5. There are three sorts of errors committed by the sample of the study. These errors can be summarized as follows:
   a- Wrong recognition of complex prepositions.
   b- Incorrect production of such prepositions.
   c- Giving no answer.
6. The subjects' errors have been attributed to the following factors:

I. Interlingual transfer, whereby the subjects have used Arabic literal meaning separately for each word in the complex prepositions rather than giving the meaning for them as a whole. This type of error constitutes (10.5 %).

II. Intralingual transfer, whereby the subjects use their prior knowledge of the target language. This type of error constitutes (44.47 %).

III. Context of Learning, as little attention has been paid to such prepositions by textbook writers and instructors. This sort of error constitutes (24.5 %).

IV. Communication strategies which are selected by the subjects to fill the gap of their knowledge. This type of error constitutes (20.53 %).

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# Appendix I
## The Test

**Q.I/ Put the following complex prepositions in grammatical sentences.**

Example: We collected the money in behalf of the homeless.

1) on top of 2) away from 3) up to 4) owing to 5) with respect to 6)as to 7) with the exception of 8) in common with 9) but for 10) out of.

**Q.II/ Underline the complex prepositions.**

Example: They are here **<u>because of</u>** us.

1- I got the job on the strength of your recommendation.

2- The game was called off on account of rain.

3- I had nothing on except for my socks.

4- Contrary to our expectations, the movie was a delightful spoof.

5- As for food for the party, that's all being taken care of.

6- Teachers are up against some major problems these days.

7- She lost her job when the factory closed, along with hundreds of others.

8- Previous to this, she'd always been well.

9- He built up the business at the expense of his health.

10- The organization put me in contact with other people in a similar position.

**Q.III/ Write the appropriate complex preposition that best fills in the blank from the list below.**

Example: There have been further developments_______ our meeting.

➡ subsequent to

**(in place of, in relation to, at variance with, by dint of, in exchange for, as per, outside of, together with, in view of, void of, next to)**

1-There was nothing they could do,____hoping thing would get better.

2- The sky was_____the clouds.

3- You can use milk______cream in this recipe.

4- _____  the weather, the event will now beheld indoors.

5- He succeeded______hard work.

6- He was sitting______them.

7- These conclusions are totally _______ the evidence.

8- I have some comments to make_________this matter.

9- Would you like my old TV_________this camera?

10- I sent them my order,_________a cheque for £ 40.

**Q.IV/ Identify the function of the following complex prepositions.**

Example: She was sitting nearer to Oliver. Locative ➡ preposition or Preposition of place

1- She jumped on to the horse.

2- In spite of her protestation, Harriet was persuaded to join the guild.

3- I've always used the net up till now.

4- He was unable to walk due to a leg injury.

5- Janet was standing close to me.

6- The company's position with regard to overtime is made clear in their contracts.

7- We had no trouble on the journey apart from a flat tyre.

8- It was all a great success thanks to a lot of hard work.

9- You can go as well as George.

10- Our fax number is changing as from May 12.

# Appendix II
# Suggested Answers to the Test

## Answers of Q.I:

1- Books were piled ***on top of*** one another.

2- She was ***away from*** work for a week.

3- We worked ***up to*** Christmas.

4- The game was cancelled ***owing to*** torrential rain.

5- The two groups were similar ***with respect to*** income and status.

6- ***As to*** tax, that will be deducted from your salary.

7- All his novels are set in Italy ***with the exception of*** his last.

8- Britain, ***in common with*** many other industrialized countries, has experienced major changes over the last 100 years.

9- He would have played ***but for*** a knee injury.

10- A statue made ***out of*** bronze.

## Answers of Q.II:

1- on the strength of 2- on account of 3- except for 4- contrary to 5- as for 6- up against 7- along with 8- previous to 9- at the expense of 10- in contact with.

## Answers of Q.III:

1- outside of 2- void of 3- in place of 4- In view of 5- by dint of 6- next to 7- at variance with 8- in relation to 9- in exchange for 10- together with.

## Answers of Q.IV:

1-Dimension 2- concession 3- duration 4- reason or cause 5- locative 6- respect 7- exception 8- reason or cause 9- addition 10- time